

When Americans Proved Their Worth

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They were untested. Young, green American troops. To the eyes of the British and French soldiers, worn out by four years of trench warfare, the Americans looked highly unlikely to hold the line against the Germans marching on Paris.

As Jim Yardley wrote last year in the New York Times:

World War I was the first time an American army had fought in a European war, and they were being delivered to the doorstep of a slaughterhouse. Their orders at the Marne were straightforward: Hold the line. Stop them.

[They did.](#) Today, a century after the outbreak of World War I, the [Second Battle of the Marne](#) is considered the pivotal battle of the First World War, as Allied troops blunted the German advance and started the counteroffensive that would ultimately win the war. It also became the battle that helped shape the legend and character of the modern American military, especially the Marines, and signaled the arrival of the United States as a modern military power.

In this, the 100th anniversary of World War I, the Kentucky Department of Veterans Affairs remembers and honors the Kentuckians among the four million American men and women in World War I who proved our worth to the whole world.

Kentucky's last World War I era veteran, Robley Rex, died six years ago at the great age of 107. No one alive today remembers what we naively called the War to End All Wars. It was that terrible.

It was the needs of World War I veterans that prompted Congress to expand benefits for veterans, including insurance, disability compensation and vocational rehabilitation.

World War I set the standard for American valor and determination in battle and laid the foundation for the broad array of veterans benefits and services we are proud to provide today.

Veterans Day itself began as a result of World War I. Armistice Day marks the day the allies and Germany signed the document ceasing hostilities. It took effect at the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month in 1918, a moment we still commemorate on Veterans Day.

During this Veterans Appreciation Week, Nov. 8-15, please recognize and honor all our veterans, of every war and peacetime, in memory of the first Americans who fought with our allies overseas.

As the daughter of a Marine, I have to close with this story about the Second Battle of the Marne:

Yet the battle would most define the United States Marines. At the forest known as Belleau Wood, with Germans positioned in shallow trenches or firing from inside a stone hunting lodge, the [Marines kept assaulting](#) until the battle was finally won. When a French officer at one point called for a retreat, a young Marine supposedly stood up and shouted: “Retreat? Hell, we just got here.”

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